

## Food \$ense CHANGE Cultivating Health And Nutrition through Gardening Education

In King County, as in the rest of the United States, obesity has become an epidemic. Over the last 20 years, the percentage of US children who are overweight has nearly doubled. Obesity rates are higher among low-income populations, who have greater difficulty accessing healthy diets that are high in fruits and vegetables and whole grain foods. Food \$ense CHANGE teaches healthy eating through gardening and cooking-enhanced nutrition education.



People who eat more fruits and vegetables have a lower incidence of chronic diseases. For this reason, CHANGE teaches students how to make good food choices, how to grow food, and how to prepare healthy snacks and meals. Through outdoor garden classrooms, students plant seeds, measure their growth, and harvest fruits and vegetables to eat. They learn where their food comes from and make connections between what they eat, their health, and the environment.

### Goal:

- Improve the nutrition of limited-income youth and their families by teaching nutrition experientially through gardening and cooking.
- Train school teachers to integrate nutrition education into their existing curricula.
- Encourage an environment of healthy eating in Food \$ense schools.

### Healthy Food in Motion

After learning about food advertising in a CHANGE class, students asked why we don't see any ads for fruits and vegetables. Inspired by their questions, Food \$ense CHANGE, with assistance from a grant from King County Steps to a Healthier US, decided to place fruit and vegetable advertisements drawn by children in Metro buses. In the spring, children in 40 elementary school classrooms participated in a contest to draw the advertisements. The winning 120 colorful expressions of healthy foods were chosen, and their original artwork laminated for the signs. Accompanying the artwork was a message about the benefits of consuming more fruits and vegetables, written in multiple languages to more effectively reach all bus riders. The ads were placed on buses serving South King County for 3 months in the fall. The project attracted both local and national attention with articles in the Seattle P-I and on the Nickelodeon News website. More of the bus artwork can be viewed at [www.goodfoodstrategies.com/healthykids](http://www.goodfoodstrategies.com/healthykids).



4th graders from Thorndyke Elementary produce poster for campaign

*Photo: P.J. Brown, P-I*

### CHANGE Classes in Elementary Schools

Food \$ense educators teach a series of ten garden-enhanced nutrition classes to students grades K-6 in low-income elementary schools. Students have the **opportunity to grow, harvest, and prepare foods while learning about good nutrition**. Educators coordinate school gardens and train teachers to incorporate nutrition education into their classroom work. In 2005, these teachers taught an additional 2,000 hours of nutrition.

### Harvest of the Season

In a series of four lessons throughout the year, teachers and students cook with **fresh-from-the-farm produce**. Each lesson features a seasonal crop: apples, cabbage, carrots and greens. **All the produce is purchased from a local farm**. Students learn about nutritious fruits and vegetables, local farms, seasonality and freshness. After each lesson, many students report that they later prepare the recipes at home with their families. In its first year, 103 classrooms participated in the program, some in conjunction with CHANGE classes.

## CHANGE in the Schools

### Healthy WASL Snacks

The rigorous WASL's consist of seven days of testing over a period of three weeks. Food \$ense collaborated with Highline School District Nutrition Services, Full Circle Farms and Pioneer Organics to provide healthy snacks that reinforced the concepts taught during CHANGE lessons. 1,220 students received healthy snacks of fruits, vegetables, nuts and dried fruits during the weeks of the WASL tests; Food \$ense provided healthy snacks to 4th graders in schools enrolled in the CHANGE program during WASL testing days. Teachers and students worked together to prepare the snacks under Food \$ense's supervision. Teachers praised Food \$ense for the beautiful produce and the students thanked us for the delicious snacks.

### Family Nights

Family Nights allow us to **reach the parents** of children enrolled in CHANGE classes, teaching entire families about nutrition. In 2005, we coordinated 8 family nights, reaching 582 kids and 475 parents. Families prepared recipes, played fruit and vegetable bingo, and ran the fiber relay race.

### Chef in the Classroom

This new class teaches students about whole foods. They learn to **read and understand food labels**, comparing food they cook themselves to packaged foods.



### Teaching Nutrition through Gardening and Cooking

In its third year of teaching nutrition experientially through gardening and cooking, Food \$ense CHANGE increased participation in our schools for fall 2005 and expanded to include the Seattle School District. In 2005, Food \$ense CHANGE was taught in **13 schools in South King County**; reaching nearly **4,000 students in 160 classrooms**, with over **1,000 nutrition classes** taught in the Highline, Tukwila and Seattle School Districts. Highlights of the program include CHANGE classes, Harvest of the Season, Chef in the Classroom and Family Nights.

### Steps Mini-Grants in the Schools

Salmon Creek and White Center Heights Elementary Schools (Highline School District) collaborated with Food \$ense CHANGE to write successful Steps School Health Champions Grants this spring. Both schools received \$3,500 for nutrition and physical activity related projects. Encouraged by their success earlier in the year, White Center Heights wrote and received another similar grant in the fall. From this funding, these schools were able to:

- Purchase 7 Harvest of the Season Cooking Carts, allowing teachers to further expand cooking and nutrition education in the classroom throughout the year;
- Students compiled a collection of cultural recipes as a companion to the cooking carts
- Librarian purchased children's cookbooks and nutrition related story books
- Children and teachers took an exciting field trip to a local organic farm as part of WSU King County Extension's Harvest Celebration, which was featured in a Seattle Times photo.



Jackie Cramer, F\$ Educator, in the corn field with students

*Photo: S. Ringman, Seattle Times*

## Martha Aitken

Martha Aitken  
Program Manager  
Food \$ense CHANGE  
(206) 205-3210  
Martha.Aitken@metrokc.gov

WSU King County Extension  
919 SW Grady Way, Suite 120  
Renton, WA 98055-2980  
<http://www.metrokc.gov/wsucce/FoodSense/CHANGE>

### Food \$ense CHANGE Staff:

Elizabeth Blessing, Jacqueline Cramer, Susie Hauck, Christine Matthes, Chris Omer

Funded in part by USDA-Food Stamp Program, state, and local government agencies.

